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Priya Sangameswaran ^a

^a Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Environment and Development, Bangalore, India

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Community Formation, ‘Ideal’ Villages and Watershed Development in Western India

PRIYA SANGAMESWARAN

Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Environment and Development, Bangalore, India

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ABSTRACT *This paper discusses how the vision of an ‘ideal village’ is used in the construction of feelings of community in a watershed development project in India. What constitutes the notion of idealness and how it emerges in a particular context is determined by a number of factors. The discussion of the working of two aspects of the project – voluntary labour and watershed-plus measures – brings out the usefulness of such a vision in community-formation, even though different actors involved in these aspects are also motivated by factors other than idealness. Further, the successful working of these aspects also indirectly re-enforces the notion of idealness, although critical engagement with it is sometimes limited by the focus on community-making.*

I. Introduction

Among the various debates that development theory and practice (especially with regard to natural resource management) have seen since around 1990, an important one is centred on ‘community’. On the one hand, ‘the community’ has come to be posited as an alternative for many of the functions that the state and market either used to perform (but no longer do) or have failed to perform satisfactorily. On the other hand, undifferentiated, homogenous understandings of community have been critiqued as they overlook a number of problems. This paper will focus on one of these problems, that is, the construction of community, and the role that the concept of ‘idealness’ can play in this regard. More specifically, the paper deals with a particular case of community-based watershed development where the concept of an ‘ideal village’ was used to build a community and bring about collective action. This was in a village called Hivre Bazar,¹ located in the district of Ahmadnagar in Maharashtra (a state in western India).

Correspondence Address: Priya Sangameswaran, CISED, Seminar Block, 1st Floor, ISEC Campus, Nagarbhavi P.O., Bangalore – 560072, India. Email: psangameswaran@gmail.com

Both the conception of this ideal community (that is, the specific elements that constitute it and their meanings), as well as its working in particular aspects of the project have been shaped by a number of factors: an earlier experiment in the region (Ralegan Siddhi), which is now regarded as a classic example of the transformation of a village by way of watershed development, the differing motivations of local-level actors, and macro-level factors and discourses.² Further, the different constituents of idealness in Hivre Bazar are used strategically by various actors to meet their own ends. The discussion in this paper re-enforces the fact that the process of community construction is a complex and contingent one (Appadurai, 1997; Mosse, 2003). While a number of such accounts are available in the case of forestry and tank irrigation, they are far more limited in the case of watershed development. A great deal of work in watershed development, at least in the Indian context, has focused on the evaluation of outcomes and best practices,³ whilst comparatively few studies have focused on other aspects such as power dynamics in processes, the political economy of policy-making, or the construction of communities.⁴ Hence, this paper contributes to both the literature on community-based efforts as well as watershed development.

The discussion in this paper is based on data collected in the course of a study focusing on equity in community-based water projects (Sangameswaran, 2005).⁵ Primary data was collected in Hivre Bazar during a three-month stay in the village – from November 2001 to January 2002 – and occasional short visits before and after this period. A combination of semi-structured interviews, participation in some village-level activities, open-ended discussions and direct observation was used. Secondary data about the village were collected from village officials, as well as from the village-level organisation involved in the implementation of the watershed development programme, government publications, and reports in the local press.

In section two, the author traces the trajectory of the concept of community, particularly with respect to natural resource management and, briefly, discusses the issue of the formation of communities. In section three, the conceptualisation of community in watershed development projects in India is discussed. This is followed in section four by a brief introduction to Hivre Bazar and a discussion of the emergence and constitution of the concept of the ideal community. In sections five and six, there is discussion about how the workings of two aspects of the watershed programme – *shramdaan* (or voluntary labour) and watershed-plus measures – reflects the usefulness of having a vision of community and how they simultaneously re-enforce this vision and problematise it. The article concludes with a brief discussion of the implications of the Hivre Bazar case.

II. Conceptualisation of Communities

Tracing the Trajectory of Community

Current perceptions of community appear strongly linked to analyses of nineteenth and twentieth century scholars attempting to understand changes in society following the industrial revolution. Agrawal (1999) traces how the community was posed in opposition to the market in these analyses, with the spread of markets supposed to lead to the erosion of the community. The implications of this depended

upon the particular views postulated regarding the benefits of progress and the desirability of communities. Those who viewed progress positively often viewed communities negatively, associating the community with apathy, passivity and a static nature, and therefore viewing it as an obstacle to development. Examples of such theorists include Spencer, Marx and most modernisation theorists. Sceptics of industrialisation and modernity (such as Tönnies), on the other hand, were more concerned with the loss of social ties and the sense of belonging that the breakdown of the community entailed.

Agrawal points out that both views are problematic on two major grounds – firstly, in their singular conception of community (either as static and passive or as utopian) and, secondly, in the necessary relation postulated between the spread of progress/development/modernity and the breakdown of the community, that is, the inevitable opposition between development and community. Nevertheless, these opposing views have influenced academic and policy debates to date about how much importance should be given to communities of various kinds in development.

Similarly, in the history of natural resource management, Agrawal (1999) argues that people were considered an obstacle to conservation and ‘rational’ organisation of natural resources because it was believed that nature could be maintained in its pristine form only if untouched by human agency. Even if it was accepted that some communities might have had harmonious relations with nature in the past, it was argued that these were now no longer in force due to factors such as demographic pressures, and the penetration of market forces. This negative view of the community implied an important role for the state (and to some extent for the market) in managing natural resources.

Beginning in the 1980s, however, and even more strongly during the 1990s, the community has been championed as better serving the purposes of both natural resource management and development. This is a result of a number of concurrent factors such as unsatisfactory outcomes of centralised, top-down planning in resource management as well as in development, the spread of the neoliberal agenda since the 1990s, an increased emphasis on participatory approaches, and a growing pre-occupation with social capital and self-help (Agrawal, 1999). In the specific context of natural resource management, two other factors have been important. Firstly, the argument that ‘traditional’ communities are conservers and good resource users by virtue of the localised knowledge they possess and the harmonious relation they have with nature has resulted in an attempt to recover lost traditions of community responsibility (Gadgil and Guha, 1995; Agarwal and Narain, 1997). Secondly, research on successful management of common property resources by local communities has succeeded in reversing Hardin’s (1968) pessimistic thesis of the tragedy of the (so-called) commons, that is, the unlikelihood of community-based solutions to prevent exploitation of open access resources. The new-institutionalist strand within research on common property resources has played a particularly important role in this regard.⁶ Consisting of social scientists such as Mancur Olson, Elinor Ostrom and Robert Wade, this strand focuses on factors which are most conducive to the emergence and sustenance of communal organisations that can maintain natural resources, such as group size, degree of heterogeneity and norms such as fairness (Olson, 1965; Wade, 1988; Ostrom, 1990).

In the Indian context, too, the concept of community has been the subject of a long debate, starting in the colonial period and continuing after independence. This debate has many parallels with the liberal-communitarian debate in western political theory (Chatterjee, 1998),⁷ as well as with the debate on community versus markets in post-Industrial Revolution societies (mentioned earlier). It is useful to briefly consider the form that the debate in India took in the post-independence period since this has implications for the manner in which the community is conceptualised in watershed development policies in the country today. Perhaps the most important arena in which the debate has played itself out is in studies of villages in India, where one can distinguish between two broad schools with reference to their conceptualisation of communities (De Souza, 2001).

One school believes that India's communities were traditionally self-sufficient and consisted of cooperative individuals, hence it calls for the implementation of political and administrative measures that would enable the restoration of this idyllic past. The notion of self-governing and self-sufficient 'little republics'⁸ has found many ideological advocates, especially in the Gandhian tradition; one example is the Sarvodaya movement, under the inspiration of Jayaprakash Narayan and Vinobha Bhave (Lieten and Srivastava, 1999). There are also more recent and modified variants of this such as the argument by Ashish Nandy that traditional community structures have more resources than modern institutions to resolve disputes, tolerate differences and adjust to social change (Nandy et al., 1995). Contesting this vision are theorists who see rural India as a site of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and caste politics, or as riven by its internal heterogeneity (though often accompanied at the same time by solidarity vis-à-vis outside entities). The debate between Gandhi and Ambedkar at the time of the formulation of the Indian Constitution was based, in large measure, on differences in the particular vision of Indian villages to which each subscribed. Ultimately, it was Ambedkar's vision that prevailed, and the Gandhian call for the reconstruction of India's 'village republics' gave way to the Nehruvian project of a new, progressive India to be formed by re-educating the 'backward' peasantry (Isaac and Franke, 2001).

As a result, except for one brief interlude when there was emphasis on local control and the village community, developmental policy in India did not emphasise community-based initiatives until the 1990s. The exception was the Community Development programme, which started in 1952 with considerable enthusiasm but which resulted in merely extending the administrative and developmental functions of a centralised state; from the mid-1960s it also began to be replaced by a host of centrally-sponsored programmes and sectoral schemes of individual departments (Jain, 1985). It is only in the post-1991 era that community-based initiatives in development and natural resource management have been revived. Although this is in part due to a general trend all over the world towards such initiatives, many of the efforts in India are also justified in terms of a Gandhian vision (as we will see in the discussion of watershed development programmes). There are interesting parallels between the current revival of the idea of the community and the Community Development programme of the 1950s and 1960s – for instance, both have an emphasis on self-reliance and require community contributions (by way of cash or voluntary labour).

The trend towards community-based development and natural resource management (in India and other parts of the world) has come in for considerable criticism. For instance, critics have questioned an understanding of community that is unquestioningly autonomous from larger level formations like the state (Mosse, 1997; Agrawal and Gibson, 2001). New historical and anthropological research suggests that so-called 'traditional' communities may not be as friendly to the environment as was once believed (Agrawal, 1999), or even if they were so in the past, they might not have that potential in a vastly changed present context (Baviskar, 1996). Furthermore, community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) might not involve true participation by the community: a project might continue to be top-down with just token involvement from community members. The actual and potential fissures within communities along the lines of caste, status, religion, and gender, and the inequalities resulting from them, are often ignored in CBNRM (Leach et al., 1999). Mosse (2003) also points out that policy models of collective action and CBNRM are often narrowly utilitarian and economic and, lead to a separation of resource management from other aspects of social and cultural life. However, the critique that is most relevant from the point of view of this paper is to do with the fact that there are no communities arising 'naturally' from the coincidence of factors such as language, kinship, culture and modes of livelihood (Singleton, 2001; Mosse, 2003). Instead, communities come to be formed as a result of a wide variety of factors. It is to a brief discussion of this aspect that I now turn.

Formation of Communities

The starting point for any community-based project is demarcating a specific group of people as 'the community' on the basis of factors such as technical feasibility, administrative convenience and political constraints. Sometimes, existing units like a village are used; sometimes, new communities are designated for the purpose at hand, such as when appropriate target groups are pinned down for the delivery of developmental services (Li, 2001). However, while demarcating a particular unit as a community has important implications for who is included and who is excluded, it does not automatically lead to the creation of feelings of community, or what Appadurai (1997) calls the 'production of locality'.⁹ However, policy initiatives usually pay scant attention to this aspect except insofar as they emphasise (implicitly or explicitly) certain features which are considered conducive to community formation. This is in spite of the fact that feelings of community are inherently fragile, and need to be built and maintained carefully in the face of changing circumstances (Appadurai, 1997; Mosse, 2003).

In CBNRM, for instance, one common conceptualisation of community is in terms of its constituent elements; more specifically, in terms of spatial characteristics (territorial affiliation or size), common interests and homogeneity of ethnicity, language and culture for example, with the assumption that these features will lead to harmony, aid cooperative solutions and result in better resource management (Agrawal, 1999). Agrawal argues that this conceptualisation neither discusses the cause of these features nor articulates clearly their effects on natural resource use. For instance, the relationship between heterogeneity and successful collective action is complex and the idea that communities are necessarily socially homogenous, or

that such homogeneity is a requirement for them to act collectively and realise shared goals, is problematic (Vedeld, 2000). There is also too much focus on the material outcome of collective action and lack of discussion of the interplay between the material outcome and non-material feelings of community (Mosse, 2003).

While the complex dynamics involved in the construction of communities have long been the subject of study in the anthropological literature, this aspect has received far less attention in the context of recent community-based efforts. Among the limited studies that do exist, a number of different routes of community-making have been put forth: the use of reified visions of communities, the making of myths and spectacles and, the emancipatory rhetoric of autonomy and equal rights surrounding the modern developmental state (Li, 1996, 2001; Chatterjee, 1998; De Souza, 2001). My focus in this paper is on the first route, that is, the use of reified visions of communities. Li (1996) argues that even though such representations of communities may lack ethnographic accuracy, they are capable of producing strategic policy gains, strengthening the claims of disadvantaged groups and creating feelings of community. Furthermore, while these could differ in the particular features that they lay stress on – harmony, equality, tradition and so forth – the notion of idealness is implicitly present in many of them; this is evident, for instance, when particular cases are ‘showcased’ as being a ‘model’ for how specific aspects of development (participation and sustainable management of resources, for example) should take place. However, idealness could also be an explicit vision in itself. This was the case in Hivre Bazar, where the vision of an ideal village community was (and continues to be) used in the construction of community.¹⁰

There are a number of reasons why ‘idealness’ as a concept can play a useful role in community-making.¹¹ Firstly, it is a concept which is found in colloquial usage and, which, can therefore be appreciated by a large number of people. Secondly, it can function as a normative goal and provide a stronger ‘vocabulary of legitimation for requests to be made and pressure to be exerted,’ a point that (Li, 1996: 509) makes in the context of social visions in general. Thirdly, the concept is open to different interpretations and, therefore, offers space for locally grounded versions to emerge. Thus, the different constituents of idealness in Hivre Bazar – indigeneity, fairness, self-sufficiency and development – have specific meanings in the village, even as they draw upon supra-local factors; in turn, these subjective versions of idealness can, and often do, have effects beyond the local.

Before turning to the vision of the ‘ideal village community’ in Hivre Bazar, it is useful to consider the vision of community in watershed development in general and the *Adarsh Gav Yojana*, in particular.

III. Conceptualisation of Community in Watershed Development in India

Following the revival of the community in academic and policy discourse in India, subjects that have traditionally been conceived and implemented in a top-down fashion, such as watershed development, have also seen a move towards community-based efforts. Although initially conceived as soil and water conservation measures to be undertaken by the government, since the 1990s watershed development has assumed the form of a comprehensive programme of rural development that aims to achieve a number of objectives – optimum utilisation of natural resources,

employment generation, restoration of ecological balance, improvements in the social and economic condition of disadvantaged sections, and sustained community action (Government of India, 1994).¹²

In order to understand how official watershed guidelines and norms conceptualise community, it is useful to consider two inter-related aspects – the unit that is chosen for implementation and the features associated with this unit. With respect to the first aspect, technically speaking, the unit of operation and implementation of a watershed development programme should simply be the watershed (that is, the entire area that supplies water to a river). The logic is that a watershed is a more or less self-contained hydrological system: externality effects of soil and water movements between watersheds are limited in comparison to those within watersheds (Dixon, 1997). Yet, in practice, to avoid problems of co-ordination between different administrative units, the unit of operation usually used is not a watershed but a village.¹³ With respect to the second aspect, there is an emphasis on features that are believed to facilitate collective action (such as size and homogeneity). In fact, the choice of a village as a unit of implementation is motivated not just by administrative convenience but, also, by the assumption that the people of a village share a common history, ethnicity and interests and, therefore, are more able to come together to work for a common goal such as watershed development. This emphasis is also evident in the actual choice of villages for watershed development. Those with homogeneity in terms of land-holding and with a low percentage of commons land are chosen so that an important source of conflict in watershed development is eliminated (Kerr et al., 2002) and villages where ‘harmony’ is present (as evinced by the perceived non-existence of factional relationships or the absence of radical social movements) are favoured (Baviskar, 2001; De Souza, 2001; Chhotray, 2004). Thus, in general, guidelines for watershed development either downplay individual differences in a village and hold that the common good of community overrides these, or subscribe to the new-institutionalist belief that villagers will have the capacity to develop institutions that would enable differences to be resolved and common ground to be found for co-operation. As Chhotray (2004) argues, these positions are very much in line with a communitarian vision.¹⁴

While there are a number of problems with the above conceptualisation of community (such as the problems involved in not having a hydrological unit as the basis for implementation), the most important one from the point of view of this paper is the lack of importance accorded to the process of construction of community. The only provision in the 1994 guidelines that dealt, to a limited extent, with community formation were the entry-point activities for confidence-building, which usually involved undertaking or repairing village-level works such as schools and drinking water sources (Government of India, 1994). This is usually done in a perfunctory manner, except in a few cases where the provision has been imaginatively used for community-building. In general, since the mere presence of particular features does not necessarily result in feelings of togetherness or belonging, collective action does not always take place (especially in a sustained fashion) even when villages are purposively selected; when such action does take place, there are usually other factors also at play in providing the ‘glue’ of community, such as a particular vision of community. While the national-level guidelines do contain some elements of a communitarian vision (Chhotray, 2004), it

is only in specific programmes or particular cases of watershed development that this vision is sometimes clearly developed and articulated. One such example is Ralegan Siddhi and the scheme that it inspired – the *Adarsh Gav Yojana* (AGY).

Ralegan Siddhi is a village in western India where watershed development was undertaken from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s; this, along with a number of social changes, has led to improvements in the lives of the villagers (Aswathi and Panmand, 1994). In Ralegan Siddhi, the notion of the village as a family has formed the basis of its watershed programme and of development in general (Sharma, 2006). This, in turn, has resulted in an emphasis on unity and natural harmony, enabling people to be brought together for particular social and economic ends. There is also an attempt to be self-sufficient, to ensure that the needs of different sections of society are met, as well as to come up with an alternative vision of development. However, there is not enough space for differences of opinion. This is evident, for instance, in the emphasis on a consensual view, whether in the nomination of a *sarpanch* (head of village) or the imposition of values such as vegetarianism, as well as the use of force (physical and social) when consensus was difficult to come by. The view of the village as a family also led to a leadership that was based on patron-client relations and the exercise of moral authority by Anna Hazare (the man behind the Ralegan success story) (Sharma, 2006).

AGY shared a similar vision. The main aim of the scheme was to create self-sufficient and self-reliant villages through people's help. Its basic philosophy was to encourage social discipline and to bring people together to overcome social barriers and political factionalism for the common good (Government of Maharashtra, n.d.). This is evident, for instance, in the fact that villages were chosen only if they were willing to practice the *panchasutri* or five principles¹⁵ that were an integral part of the project (or even better, were already practicing at least some of these) (Government of Maharashtra, n.d.).

For the purpose of discussion in this paper, a couple of points need to be noted at this juncture. Firstly, Ralegan Siddhi is a good example of how a particular vision can be used to construct a community, even if it is ethnographically inaccurate and leads to consequences that could be perceived as problematic from particular normative viewpoints (such as the nature of leadership). Secondly, any process of community formation is both context-driven, as well as context-generative (to borrow Appadurai's (1997) terms). Thus, for instance, Ralegan Siddhi provided the inspiration for AGY. AGY was set up in the context of a national/international environment where watershed development was beginning to acquire importance due to a number of factors: scepticism about medium and large irrigation works on grounds such as environmental sustainability and rehabilitation; emphasis on agricultural development in semi-arid regions; the perception that at least certain formulations of watershed development were conducive to sustainable development; revival of the concept of indigenous knowledge; and (re)emergence of the idea of 'community' as the basis for development and natural resource management. Yet, the immediate factor that led to the setting up of the scheme was a state-level one. In 1992, the scheme was set up by the government of Maharashtra at the suggestion of a well-known freedom fighter, called Achyutrao Patwardhan, in order to commemorate the golden anniversary of the August Kranti Day (an important event in the freedom struggle against the British) (Varghade, 2002). The conception

of the scheme was influenced by the idea of creating ideal villages in the style of Ralegan Siddhi in each of the three hundred *talukas* (sub-districts) then present in Maharashtra. Thus, it is an example of how reified notions of the community can help in formulating policy (Li, 1996). In this case, there is also a play of words involved, with the idealised notion of community becoming the basis for the very nomenclature of the scheme.¹⁶

However, the numerous cases of AGY that have failed also indicate that merely having a vision of community in project guidelines does not necessarily lead to community formation. Any idealised version of community needs to be strategically used to construct a community and to be supported by a suitable constellation of macro and micro factors. Thus, in the case of Hivre Bazar, we will see below how the vision of an 'ideal village' has been successfully used by the *sarpanch* to construct a community. At the same time, this process has also been aided by a number of factors. For instance, the active involvement of Anna Hazare in the early stages of the scheme and the fact that Anna was a mentor of Popatrao Pawar meant that there was timely disbursal of funds to the village.¹⁷ This was unlike the fate of many other villages under the scheme where either the financial resources allotted to various components were not in proportion to actual requirements or funds were not made available at the right time (Ghare, personal communication).¹⁸ This was one of the contributing factors in the successful implementation of watershed development in Hivre Bazar, which in turn re-enforced its self-image as an 'ideal village'.

IV. The Ideal Village Community of Hivre Bazar

Introduction to the Hivre Bazar case

Until the early 1990s, Hivre Bazar was a typical semi-arid village in western India, with low agricultural productivity, scarce irrigation water, limited employment opportunities, and high levels of out-migration. Although it had at one time been famous for wrestling, this died out by the 1970s; from the early 1970s until the late 1980s, the village appears to have been a place of considerable strife due to rampant in-fighting and factionalism, accompanied by large-scale alcoholism and gambling. In 1989, a small group of young villagers, who were tired of the prevailing socio-economic situation, called upon a person (who was originally from the village but had left it to study outside) to come back to the village and help bring about changes. This person, Popatrao Pawar, was elected as the *sarpanch*, a post to which he has subsequently been re-elected twice. When Popatrao Pawar was first elected in 1989, he was not even known to all the villagers, since he had left the village when approximately seven years old. Some suspected him of ulterior motives, as people could not understand why an educated youth with good job prospects in urban areas would want to come back to work in his village, without monetary remuneration. The fact that he refused to align himself with any of the existing factions added to the suspicion. Eventually, however, he came to be accepted and played an important role in ending conflict in the village. The fact that he was originally from the village facilitated his acceptance; at the same time, his semi-outsider status came to be perceived as an asset because it meant that he had greater knowledge of 'the outside world'.

Under Pawar's leadership, villagers came together to undertake some common works such as the repair of the temple and school rooms. After this, Pawar started the process of consultation with the villagers about the most pressing changes needed in the village. The issues that everyone seemed concerned with were the availability of water (both drinking and irrigation) and the low productivity of agriculture. A visit was then organised to Ralegan Siddhi, so that villagers could see for themselves the benefits of watershed development. When the *Adarsh Gav Yojana* was introduced in 1992, Hivre Bazar was one of its first applicants. The scheme was implemented in the village from 1994–99 by a village-level organisation formed for the purpose (which worked closely with the *Gram Panchayat*, the elected unit of local governance). It resulted in increased water in the village, which in turn has led to improvements in agriculture and dairy farming, as well as raised income levels. The improved economic and social situation has also resulted in some 'reverse migration', with many people who had moved out of the village for employment returning to the village to live and work. Furthermore, unlike many cases of watershed development where there are no restrictions on the use of water, the village has adopted two rules regarding water use – a ban on borewells for agriculture and a ban on the cultivation of water-intensive crops such as sugarcane. As a result of all these changes the village has won numerous awards, including the National Productivity Award in Dryland Farming in 1997–98. It has also become well known in government and non-governmental organisations (NGO) circles and is the subject of academic studies and the site of 'developmental tourism'. While there are a number of aspects of the Hivre Bazar case that are interesting, my focus here will be on how the vision of an 'ideal' village has been used in the construction of feelings of community.

The author begins by describing the unit that constituted the community in the case of the watershed project at Hivre Bazar. State government projects in Maharashtra typically choose a single village as the unit of implementation and work in micro-watersheds within the village. This enables them to maintain the integrity of the watershed approach while retaining the administrative convenience of working in a village (Kerr, 2002). This was the approach followed in Hivre Bazar. A village of 976.4 hectares was divided into three micro-watersheds, the first with an area of 612.14 hectares, the second with an area of 123.4 hectares, and the third with an area of 241.3 hectares. Apart from being small, the village Hivre Bazar also fulfills the condition of homogeneity along a number of different axes. It consists predominantly of Marathas, the dominant caste in Maharashtra in terms of both numerical strength and political power. The distribution of landholdings is also relatively egalitarian and this has helped to ensure a reasonable degree of convergence of economic interests. Since watershed development primarily affects productivity of land and the majority of the villagers would benefit because they were landed, consensus on the need for watershed development was not difficult to come by. Finally, the condition of what Vedeld (2000) calls 'political homogeneity' was also satisfied in Hivre Bazar from the 1990s (there was acceptance of a common leader).

Yet even while many factors conducive to collective action were present, there was also one important deterrent, namely, rampant drinking and in-fighting in the village. In fact, before the idea of watershed development through AGY was

conceived, Popatrao had approached an NGO working in the region to undertake watershed development in the village. The NGO refused, claiming that the social situation was not conducive to collective action. Popatrao's role in constructing a community in Hivre Bazar by using the vision of an 'ideal village' is even more important in light of this. Before considering what this vision of idealness entailed and how it worked in two specific instances (*shramdaan* and watershed-plus measures), I will just briefly indicate the general vision of community in Hivre Bazar.

Like the vision of 'village as family' in Ralegan Siddhi, the vision in Hivre Bazar is also communitarian, in that there is emphasis on a 'common good' and on people keeping aside their individual differences and coming together to attain this. The practice of unanimous nomination of members to all village-level institutions (instead of election by majority vote) is present here too. The usual rationale given for this is to avoid the factionalism that stems from excessive interference by political parties in local elections. However, the principle of majority voting may also not be acceptable because, as Platteau and Abraham (2002) argue, it would give an official status to the existence of disagreements and this may be inconsistent with both a communitarian vision as well as with the image of an ideal village. At the same time, it is not as if there is no space for differences of opinion; on the contrary, differences are recognised and resolved amicably whenever possible, albeit outside the domain of formal institutions. A number of instances were recounted, for instance, of how the *sarpanch* 'took a walk' with a person who had a divergent view in order to discuss and resolve the issue. This emphasis on discussion and negotiation could also be seen as an element of a liberal democratic ideology. Unlike in Ralegan Siddhi, the use of force (especially physical force) as a tactic to bring about change was not used in Hivre Bazar. Further, the basis of leadership was not moral authority or a patron-client relation but, brokerage. The *sarpanch* has been the facilitator for everything, be it getting a new government scheme, an electricity connection, a bank loan, or entry into the military. This can be regarded as part of an overall shift from patronage to brokerage in the political functions of local-level leaders in India, wherein village leaders no longer cultivate clients chiefly through the use of their own property but rather by facilitating the delivery of state programmes and services (Gupta, 1998).

Emergence of an Ideal Community

The theme of an ideal village recurs very often in conversations with villagers in Hivre Bazar. '*Amchā gāv ādarsh gāv āhe*' (ours is an ideal village) is a statement used in a variety of situations with different connotations: a proud villager invoking the image of an ideal village to describe his/her village to a visitor, the *sarpanch* motivating people to meet the standards of an ideal village, the *gram sevak*¹⁹ going out of his way to deal with complaints about a malfunctioning stove in an *ānganwādi* (pre-school centre), just so that an outsider who was present did not have a negative image of their ideal village, or the sarcastic reference by a police official to the suicide of a woman in the ideal village due to harassment by her husband. On the one hand, this constant invocation of an ideal community could seem like mere rhetoric. On the other hand, it has also been used to bring the villagers together, to get them to work

towards both watershed development and other developmental activities and, to create a community in a deliberate manner.

The vision of idealness in Hivre Bazar drew heavily on Ralegan Siddhi and AGY, particularly in the initial stages of watershed development. However, over a period of time, it has also assumed a form that is specific to Hivre Bazar. This is due, in part, to the way in which macrological factors (such as development) have played themselves out in this particular site, partly due to practical feasibility and, in part, to strategic behaviour by the villagers. Hence, the vision of an ideal village has not been a static one. However, broadly, one can distinguish four constituent elements in Hivre Bazar's notion of idealness: indigeneity, fairness, self-sufficiency and a particular view of development.

Perhaps the most important element of Anna's vision that Popatrao Pawar drew upon is the idea of the indigenous.²⁰ Anna emphasised change at an individual level, consciousness about social duty and moral reconstruction as a foundation for socio-economic development (Awasthi and Panmand, 1994). Since these elements are often missing in the dominant discourses of development and modernity, he would turn to elements from the past. This 'going back to the past' was also strategic. Thus, for instance, Sant Tukaram, a seventeenth century devotional writer who is highly revered in Maharashtra, is invoked by Anna because his verses offer justification for watershed development and *shramdaan* and, because he represents a symbol who would touch a chord with many people. Popatrao Pawar also learnt and used the *abhangs*, *bhajans* and *kirtans* (devotional songs in verse form) of Sant Tukaram for the same reasons. Notions of indigeneity are now an important part of much of the community-based discourse and have often influenced both policy formulation as well as their working out on the ground; what is different about Ralegan Siddhi and Hivre Bazar is the systematic and strategic use of the notion. It is also important to note that, at least in the case of Hivre Bazar, indigeneity was far more important in the initial stages of the project; in the later stages and in the post-project phase, the other three elements have acquired greater importance.

Also part of Anna's philosophy of moral values is the idea of fairness to all sections of the village population. This is another constituent of 'idealness' in Hivre Bazar. As in Ralegan Siddhi, the notion of fairness in Hivre Bazar has primarily involved giving particular groups access to various developmental schemes.²¹ However, the conceptualisation of fairness in Hivre Bazar is also influenced by the 'limits' within which equity concerns in other watershed development and water projects are taken up. For instance, following the practice in most water projects, the link between access to irrigation water and access to land is not questioned.²² This is also, partly, a strategic move, arising from pragmatic concerns on the part of the *sarpanch* and other villagers about the extent of radical concerns that can be taken up at any one time: the village had already adopted other radical measures such as a ban on borewells for agriculture and a ban on liquor dens. While this point is also applicable to Ralegan Siddhi, there were at least some attempts made there to question the link between access to land and to water for irrigation – for instance, by way of a greater emphasis on communal wells and by discouraging loans for individual wells.

The third constituent of idealness in Hivre Bazar is 'self-sufficiency'. There are two dimensions to this concept. One is the idea that at least livelihood requirements

(if not all needs) must be met within the village. In fact, AGY posits that adherence to the *panchasutri* can make villagers self-sufficient by helping them to meet their needs for water, food, fuel, and fodder within their own village. This is similar to the idea of self-sufficiency in Ralegan Siddhi; however, in Ralegan Siddhi there was also the additional dimension of curtailing consumerist desires, which is absent in Hivre Bazar. The second dimension of self-sufficiency is a particular pragmatic relation with the state and markets. In its most extreme form in the CBNRM literature, the ideal village community takes the form of independent 'village republics', which are self-sufficient unto themselves. This is a myth, even historically (see Guha, 2000). Yet, apart from the question of feasibility, there is also the question of how far 'independence' is even desired by various actors involved in it (Li, 2001). In Hivre Bazar, as in most other CBNRM projects, this extreme notion of self-sufficiency is not used. Instead, the community is posited as an alternative to the state in some domains only; whilst, in others, there continues to be an expectation of active intervention by the state. Similarly, there is a desire to tap into the potential of markets, even while trying to find ways to deal with the uncertainties associated with them.

Lastly, idealness in Hivre Bazar also involves a particular view of development. Development (or the perceived lack of it) shapes both people's identities and images of community (Pigg, 1992; Gupta, 1998). That is, there is a consciousness about the 'lack of development' (equated in most cases with the lack of modern amenities) and people identify themselves as being backward and behind. This, in combination with other identities of caste, class, region and gender, informs their sense of self, a point that Gupta argues is characteristic of the working of the post-colonial condition. Along with this, there is also a desire and a constant striving to become 'developed' and the concept of idealness encompasses this desire.

Further, like development in all locales, the concept of development in Hivre Bazar, even while it includes some universalistic notions of progress and modernity, is also locally grounded. Thus, villagers in Hivre Bazar question some aspects of mainstream development but accept others. For instance, many of the villagers do not want the 'side-effects' of modernity that are usually considered inevitable (such as pollution resulting from industries). At least some kinds of sustainability concerns are also important: for instance, avoiding excessive use of chemical fertilisers. This, in turn, is something that goes against the path of input-intensive agricultural development usually promoted by governments. At the same time, certain indicators of development such as *pucca* houses²³ are unquestioningly accepted by most people, even though some critical voices about the suitability of such structures to local conditions are occasionally heard in the village. It would be naïve to claim that these reactions (whether for or against particular aspects of mainstream development) are always a result of perfect reflexivity on the part of villagers critically engaging with discourses of development. For instance, the questioning of the use of chemical fertilisers is not just based on their side-effects but also stems from their high cost and the greater availability of organic fertilisers (manure) in the aftermath of watershed development (due to increased cattle cultivation). At the same time, these local reactions could potentially contribute to an alternative vision of development, albeit one whose articulation is incomplete and ongoing. More importantly (for the purpose of this paper), the desire to

become ‘developed’ acquires a subjective meaning in Hivre Bazar and this, in turn, adds a particular local flavour to idealness.

To understand how the above four constituents of idealness are used in the construction of a community in Hivre Bazar, it is useful to consider specific aspects of the watershed programme. While there are a number of possible aspects that one could consider – participation, interaction of the community with the state and with markets, and so forth – the focus here is on *shramdaan* and watershed-plus measures. The working of *shramdaan* and watershed-plus measures indicates how the use of the vision of idealness is a complex process. Firstly, the different actors involved in them are not just motivated by idealness or its constituent elements but, by other factors too. Secondly, whatever the motivations for people’s acquiescence in the working of *shramdaan* and watershed-plus measures, a variety of macro-level and structural factors also influence their actual working and, therefore, shape the notion of idealness. Thirdly, *shramdaan* and watershed-plus measures have not only helped in the formation of feelings of community in the beginning of the project but have helped to sustain it by continuously re-enforcing the notion of an ideal village community both among villagers and in outsiders’ minds. That is to say, even when considerations other than idealness are involved in the working of different aspects of watershed development, they still feed into notions of the ideal.²⁴

Before turning to a discussion of *shramdaan* and watershed-plus measures, however, it is important to note that the process of construction of an ideal village has proceeded even in the face of differences. The process of watershed development typically results in conflicts of various kinds. For instance, during the project, conflicts may arise due to the bans on free grazing and tree felling (which are usually part of watershed development). In the post-project phase, differences could arise due to unequal distribution of benefits (whether in terms of economic outcome or political power) or the kind of developmental strategies adopted. In Hivre Bazar, attempts to mitigate the negative impact of restrictions on free grazing (for instance, by encouraging rotational grazing) and the use of watershed-plus measures (which are further discussed below) not only ensured that the equity impact was more positive than in many other watershed programmes (Sangameswaran, 2006) but, also, that conflicts did not emerge around these issues. The tactic of discussion and negotiation used by the *sarpanch* (discussed in the previous section) also helped in this regard.

This is not to say that there is no discontent or disagreement with the results of watershed development and other developmental activities. For instance, SR is a medium farmer who has benefited to some extent from watershed development, in that he now has more irrigation water than before. Yet, he also claims that the water situation is not as good as it is made out to be because he still has to borrow even drinking water in the summer (especially in years of low rainfall). Similarly, some large farmers bemoan the ‘loss’ that they incur due to the ban on borewells. Inadequate attention to non-land based activities (which is typical of all watershed interventions) means that the needs of members of different economic classes have not been met to the same extent; in one case, this led to the break-up of a self-help group (SHG) in the village. There were some women in the SHG from large and medium farm households who had enough farm work to occupy them all year around and who were not interested in taking up any non-farm income-generating

activity. On the other hand, there were also poor women who were interested in non-land based activities such as incense-making, especially in the summer months when agricultural work was limited. No agreement could be reached between the two groups and, as a result, the SHG broke up. These examples show that not everyone is happy with all changes in the village, and therefore do not necessarily feel that their village is 'ideal' in all respects. At the same time, these tensions do not mean that they would want to do away with the current notion of 'idealness' and all that it has resulted in. Thus, SR, when questioned by government officials or important visitors, gives the standard response of all villagers that 'everyone now has water,' no one has (so far) violated the ban on borewells and other SHGs with members from different classes are still functional (although their rationale may be different, as we will see in the discussion in Section VI). The lack of overt conflict and continued acquiescence to the concept of idealness is in large measure due to the pragmatic consideration of villagers that tying in their lot with the village community, whatever its drawbacks, is still the best bet for them – whether it is because they at least get some increased water or income, or because they are able to access certain developmental services more easily, or because of the improved social atmosphere in the village, or a feeling of pride in 'belonging' to an ideal village, or the 'accessibility' of the *sarpanch*.

The author now turns to the specific case of *shramdaan* and watershed-plus measures for a more detailed discussion of how a community was constructed in Hivre Bazar using different constituents of idealness.

V. Shramdaan

Shramdaan is an instance where the image of an ideal community helped to create a feeling of community and was also strategically useful in securing a high degree of voluntary labour. However, different actors managed to use it to meet their own ends, that is, there are varied motivations for *shramdaan* and the result is a variety of originally unintended uses. In spite of this, the working of *shramdaan* has helped to re-enforce the notion of idealness.

The theoretical route by way of which *shramdaan* is supposed to help in constructing a community has been explicitly put forth in the guidelines of the *Adarsh Gav Yojana*. *Shramdaan* brings people together for the welfare of the entire community, creates satisfaction when people see the result of their work and makes them responsible for maintaining the structures in which they have invested their labour. Hence one person from each family should contribute two days of labour per month (Government of Maharashtra, n.d.).

In Hivre Bazar, the *sarpanch* tried to use *shramdaan* even before the watershed project. This was in the initial stages of his tenure when he initiated works such as the repairs of the village temple and school. Initially, hardly any one would show up to contribute labour but, slowly the number of people started increasing. By the time the work on the temple and the school was completed, at least some feelings of unity and solidarity had developed in the village. These feelings became further strengthened in the course of the watershed development project.²⁵ In trying to get people to contribute labour, two features of the ideal village community were invoked as a justification by the *sarpanch* and others actively involved in village-level

activities: the idea of indiginity and the notion of the community as an alternative to the state (at least in certain domains), that is, self-sufficiency.

Beginning with the first aspect, *shramdaan* was put forward by the *sarpanch* and others as a traditional village-level practice, harking back to times when strong village-level community institutions existed (or were supposed to exist) and were involved in the upkeep of various village works such as temples and irrigation tanks, a practice which has become increasingly rare. The revival of the idea of *shramdaan* then becomes part of the revival of the indigenous. As in the justification used for watershed development, extensive use was made of the *kirtans*, *abhangs* and *bhajans* of the patron saints of Maharashtra such as Sant Tukaram in order to motivate people to contribute labour voluntarily. Irrespective of the extent to which *shramdaan* really existed in the past, and the particular manner in which it existed (that is, who actually contributed labour and how voluntary it was), there is no doubt that this particular invocation has succeeded in creating a feeling of pride and co-operation in the village. As one of the villagers eloquently put it '*shramadānāché amrut pājuni fātלה gāv julvila*' (only by making people partake of the nectar of *shramdaan* was the strife-ridden village induced to come together) (Pawar, 2001: 9).

Shramdaan was also posited as an integral part of the decentralisation process, where villages cease to rely on the state to provide essential services and instead begin to make provision for these on their own. The practice of contributing labour initially began for works for which none or limited sources of outside funds were available; this was later continued in the course of village works such as watershed development, even when money was available to pay wages to workers. The money thus saved was used for other developmental work in the village. Partly as a result of these two invocations, the percentage of households in the village contributing labour has been high (unlike the experience in many other watershed programmes). In this sense, a community was created.

However, the high contribution of *shramdaan* has had a variety of other motivations and explanations. Some held that *shramdaan* was an important means of making themselves 'visible'; it was almost like a favour that could be called upon at some future time to be redeemed – such as for a recommendation for a bank loan by the headman or a job transfer. For instance, one woman whose daughter had just passed her D.Ed.²⁶ examination wanted her daughter to be posted in a location close to home and was hoping that the *sarpanch* would intervene in this regard. She explained that they would not have turned to the *sarpanch* for such a favour if they had not contributed *shramdaan*. Even if no future favours were anticipated, not contributing labour might still be seen as a matter of shame. In such cases, labour contributions were forthcoming not because of any ideological commitment to *shramdaan* but, in a bid to maintain one's prestige and position in society (even if such contributions involved the loss of a day's income, which could be critical for a poor family). In fact, since contributing labour was a pre-condition for ensuring that the village got its share of funds from the government, not coming forward for *shramdaan* (even if one did not benefit directly from the work in question) would mean that the 'required' percentage of *shramdaan* would not be met, adversely affecting the granting of funds and this in turn could invite the ire of other villagers.²⁷

Further, the very manner of participation in *shramdaan* is used to signal one's standing in the village; for instance, two big farmers in the village now contribute tractors instead of labour. Similarly, there has also been a change over time in which members of the household go for *shramdaan*. Initially, women used to go for it but in recent times the men do so. The reason given by most villagers for this is that earlier, many men used to drink or gamble all the time and so the women had a greater stake in bringing about social and economic changes in the village. However, women now have more work (housework,²⁸ looking after animals, agricultural work) than previously, so it is more difficult for them to go for *shramdaan*. While this is no doubt true, one more factor could be at play here: cordoning off women from the public sphere, especially with an improvement in the economic position of the household, a practice that has now been well-documented in the South Asian literature (see, for instance, Agarwal, 1997, 2001). Here, the contribution of voluntary labour becomes an arena where differential hierarchies or power positions (in this case, those related to gender) are reflected.

The diverse ways in which *shramdaan* plays itself out are not unique to Hivre Bazar but are present in other AGY villages (Adarsh Gav Sankalp va Prakalp, 1998), as also in other watershed projects (Baviskar, 2001). The diverse motivations of *shramdaan* problematise the existence of an ideal village, that is, the idea that people voluntarily contributed labour in Hivre Bazar out of some belief and commitment to the idea of a utopian village community. However, in spite of this, the contributions themselves feed further into the notion of the ideal community. In conversations with outsiders (especially the numerous visitors to the village who come to see the successful case of watershed development), all villagers, including the *sarpanch*, cite the high incidence of *shramdaan* as evidence of the existence (or emergence) of an ideal community in Hivre Bazar.

Furthermore, instances such as Hivre Bazar where *shramdaan* has been forthcoming and watershed development has been successful have been used by the state to justify its demand for *shramdaan* in other developmental programmes too. Yet, although governments posit the requirement of *shramdaan* in terms of community participation, decentralisation and the superior ability of communities to look after local natural resources, their motivations for *shramdaan* are usually more complicated: it is a way of dealing with increasingly pressing fiscal constraints, of fulfilling the mandate of 'participation' of funding agencies and so forth.²⁹ In this scenario, making *shramdaan* compulsory (as was the case in AGY and as is now applicable to all watershed programmes in Maharashtra, see Government of Maharashtra, 2000) and having it as a precondition for access to financial and technical aid from the government, does not leave much room for the exercise of choice among local actors. That is, 'voluntary' labour becomes mandatory and non-compliance becomes subject to 'punishment' (by way of withholding of funds).

VI. Watershed-Plus Measures

If notions of 'indigenous' and 'alternative to the state' were used in the invocation of *shramdaan*, 'fairness' and 'development' led to watershed-plus measures being taken up and implemented in a particular manner. This has helped to construct feelings of community and has also fed into the notion of idealness by seemingly rendering the

village a 'conflict-free' domain. At the same time, the emphasis on the process of construction ends up limiting the extent of critical engagement with both fairness and development.

Let me start by discussing how watershed-plus measures contributed to community-making. Watershed-plus measures in Hivre Bazar have included schemes for houses, private toilets, wells and animals, the setting up of three self-help groups (SHGs) (one for women from households Below the Poverty Line (BPL) and two for women from households Above the Poverty Line (APL))³⁰ and the provision of improved health and education facilities. The implementation of such schemes/facilities is not unique to Hivre Bazar and has been impacted by a similar trend in other kinds of watershed development projects. What is distinctive about Hivre Bazar is the attempt to be fair by actively targeting watershed-plus measures towards those who either did not directly benefit from watershed development or lost from it in some manner. For instance, when some villagers had to give up land either for watershed works or for developmental works, one of the means to compensate them was by allotting them a government scheme for any service that they required. Such provision of developmental services by way of watershed-plus measures would sometimes also increase the range of possible choices (or entitlement set, see Sen, 1984) for recipients under certain circumstances. This was the case, for instance, with the R-s, a landless family that was the beneficiary of a subsidised housing scheme. The scheme not only fulfilled their need for an independent and secure dwelling place but also made them less dependent on the landowners whose land they sharecropped (by giving them the option of not staying on the owner's land), as well as making it easier for them to discontinue the sharecropping arrangement when differences with the owner arose and to take up wage labour instead.

In general, watershed-plus measures – by providing developmental services and increasing the range of possible choices – have served to improve the quality of life of the recipients and thereby to vindicate people's decision to place their lot with the 'village community' (at least in their own eyes). In fact, feelings of community were created even in cases where watershed development and the watershed-plus measures have not helped to improve the economic situation of particular households to a very high degree, mainly because of people's own perception that the general distribution of benefits in the village (especially from watershed-plus measures) has been fair. For instance, AL is a single woman whose prime benefit from the development in the village has been that she now no longer has to go outside the village to find work. Yet she barely manages to eke out an existence and is not a member of the BPL SHG, although she is evidently poor. In spite of this, she is quite certain in her belief that '*sarpanchācha laksha āhe mājhāvar*' (the *sarpanch* looks out for me), something that presumably adds to her well-being. Even though this belief is motivated in part by the *sarpanch*'s past attempts to intervene in the fights between her husband and herself, his role in ensuring fair targeting of the watershed-plus measures has also contributed to it. For instance, when a reasonably well-to-do farmer tried to get a housing scheme meant for the landless in his daughter-in-law's name (who did not have any land in her name), the *sarpanch* convinced him against applying for it, pointing out that it did not befit someone of their economic status to try and take advantage of a bureaucratic loop-hole to get a scheme which they really did not need. This and similar interventions by the *sarpanch* have served the purpose of

legitimising his role in the eyes of the villagers. This, in turn, aids his work in constructing a community and also feeds further into the notion of Hivre Bazar being an ideal village.

It is important to note that watershed-plus measures are undertaken not just because of fairness but, also, because they help to prevent and/or resolve conflicts between various classes that could arise because of differential distribution of costs and benefits of the watershed programme. In fact, such conflicts are usually a major cause of tensions in other watershed programmes and sometimes lead to disruptions in the implementation of the project or to lack of sustainability of project interventions. The 'fair' distribution of watershed-plus measures in Hivre Bazar means that there are no overt conflicts, even though, as discussed earlier, occasional murmurings of discontent are sometimes heard. This, in turn, has contributed to Hivre Bazar's image as a village that is 'free of politics', which fits in with the communitarian notion of village as a family. This also re-enforces the notion of idealness and justifies continued receipt of funds from the state government. At the same time, this very aspect of watershed-plus measures – that they feed into a communitarian vision and into the image of an ideal village – also ends up limiting at times the vision of idealness itself. Thus, even as subjective feelings of fairness have contributed to the determination of people's well-being (see Scott, 1976), they have also made it difficult to mobilise people to bring about other kinds of changes that may be desirable from certain normative standpoints. For instance, the fact that those with more land will/should benefit from watershed development to a greater degree than those with less land is accepted not only by the *sarpanch* and those who are actively involved in village-level works but, also, finds resonance in many (though not all) villagers. Thus CR and DM, two single women with about two acres of land each, who also sharecrop (and are members of the BPL SHG), when discussing how they had benefited from watershed development said: 'what can the *sarpanch* do if our fates are bad – he can't buy us land or give us more money, can he?' That is to say, the idea of redistributing a resource such as land did not even cross their minds.

There are also macro-level factors that can constrain the ability of watershed-plus measures to ensure fairness (and therefore idealness). For instance, the classification of households into the categories of BPL and APL is undertaken by the state government and determines who can become members of which kind of SHG. Yet the classification is both outdated and faulty. Hence, even though the BPL SHG has the potential to make a positive equity impact, this potential is limited by the problematic nature of the classification (since only BPL card-holders can become members of the BPL SHG). In fact, this classification is often a source of bitterness because it is the basis of not just membership of BPL SHGs but also of access to other state services (such as a higher subsidy for commodities distributed by way of the Public Distribution System).³¹

Since watershed-plus measures involve the provision of developmental services and these are not value-neutral, adopting them might also end up perpetuating certain hierarchies/stereotypes. Consider, for example, the working of the APL SHGs in Hivre Bazar. One of the rationales for setting them up was their potential to 'liberate' or 'empower' women. Given the fact that women are not noticeably involved in the decision-making process in the public arena and given that the village

is now increasingly subject to scrutiny on all counts as a successful case of watershed development, the setting up of the SHGs constituted an important aspect of being an ideal village and, in particular, of the role that women in such a village must play. Thus, one of the main motivations for registering the *Shakuntala Sambale Bachat Gat* (an APL SHG), even though there was hardly anything to be gained by doing so,³² was that there should be at least two formally registered SHGs in an ideal village (the BPL SHG was the first to be set up and registered). However, in the absence of the recognition of the broader socio-economic changes needed to empower women in any meaningful sense, this undue emphasis on mere formation and registration of SHGs is meaningless, especially considering the trouble involved in doing so.³³

Clearly, the influence of macro-level factors on the working of watershed-plus measures (and, therefore, on the meaning of fairness and development) is not easy to overcome in the context of a single micro-level experiment. Yet it is also important to keep in mind that the prime place given to creating feelings of community by way of a vision of idealness has contributed to limited engagement with these concepts.

VII. Conclusion

The discussion in this paper shows how a reified vision of community – an ideal village – has been used to construct feelings of community in Hivre Bazar. The vision of idealness was drawn from a number of sources – Ralegan Siddhi, macrological discourses such as development and the villagers' own aspirations. The actual use of this vision in the context of specific aspects of the project like *shramdaan* and watershed-plus measures has also been complex. While different constituents of idealness were invoked in their working, motivations other than idealness also played an important role. At the same time, the successful working of *shramdaan* and watershed-plus measures have re-enforced the notion of idealness, brought people together for the watershed development project and, also, constructed a community which has lasted beyond the duration of the project itself. However, even as idealness is useful in constructing a community, its conceptualisation is also limited at times by that very purpose (for instance, in the extent of critical engagement with notions of fairness and development).

Why is the Hivre Bazar experience of construction of community important? In spite of the critique of community-based efforts, belief in its potential to bring about equitable and sustainable development continues (see, for instance, Mosse, 1997; Li, 2001). Yet, for this potential to be realised, one of the many dimensions that needs to be given attention is how communities are constructed. Accounts of actual instances where this has taken place, such as Hivre Bazar, provide useful insights in this context. For instance, groups of people can come together to engage in collective action and share feelings of community on the basis of a factor (such as an idealised vision), which is not ethnographically accurate. Furthermore, although such a process need not (and cannot) be a perfectly planned one and a variety of contingent factors would determine whether and how a community comes to be constructed in any given locale, the ability to make use of these factors (as by a strong leadership in the case of Hivre Bazar) is important. The Hivre Bazar experience is also useful in that it represents an actual manifestation of the link between idealness and

community-making. Although the concept of idealness is implicitly present in much of developmental policy, in Hivre Bazar it is used both as an end in itself as well as an instrument for other ends (procuring labour contributions, ensuring the absence of conflicts). The fact that it is not 'imposed' from above but is adopted and shaped as a result of a variety of local and supra-local factors helps to make it more nuanced and textured; this also means that the concept can potentially take different forms in other locales and be used in other community-based efforts. Further, given that the specific elements which constitute idealness have themselves been the subject of considerable debate in the social science literature, the experience of individual cases such as Hivre Bazar can also contribute to these debates. Consider, for instance, the understanding of development in Hivre Bazar. This involves a *mélange* of different features, which do not necessarily fit with each other, a characteristic that Pieterse (1998) ascribes to most 'alternative development'³⁴ experiments. Also, the way that development works out in Hivre Bazar is not an alternative model that one can attempt to replicate elsewhere. However, both the understanding and actual experience of development in Hivre Bazar is still useful in that it is one more example of how a discourse such as development works itself out in varied ways in different locales (Gupta, 1998). It also hints at the potential and limits to such working and re-emphasises the importance of reflection on the dialectics between agency and structure, which in turn may lead to the emergence of other conceptions of development.

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Notes

1. The names of the village and the headman are real; names of specific villagers are fictitious.
2. Throughout the paper, the terms local and macro (or macrological) are used to refer not so much to specific sites or locations but to relative scales. Thus, the defining feature of a macro-level factor or a macrological discourse is not that it arises in sites 'outside' or 'beyond' the village but, that it is relevant to the supra-local and/or involves reference to linkages between different sites and is, therefore, best explained at larger scales. This usage borrows from the distinction between location, space and scale made in Gupta (1998) and Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal (2003).
3. For a brief review of these different studies, see, for instance Kerr et al., 2002; Joy and Paranjape (2004).
4. Examples of such studies include Baviskar, 2001; De Souza, 2001; Chhotray, 2004.
5. The study considered equity in content, processes and outcomes of various rules adopted in the course of three water projects, with Hivre Bazar being the main case study.
6. Apart from the new-institutionalist strand in CPR research, which is the dominant strand, there is also another strand which is more concerned with the problem of creating and sustaining resource access for poor and vulnerable groups in society (Johnson, 2004).

7. Liberals view individuals as autonomous actors freely choosing on the basis of their individual preferences. Further, disagreement is seen as a continuous feature of human interaction, and one that is resolved through neutral institutions in the public sphere. On the other hand, communitarians view the community as an essential component in the formation of individual identity and hold that community is a unity where all members regard the 'common good' as their own (Chhotray, 2004).
8. The reference to Indian villages as 'little republic' or 'village republics' is found in the writings of colonial administrators such as Thomas Munro and in the works of Gandhi; in more recent times, these terms have been popularised in Wade's (1988) classic on collective action in the context of irrigation in South India.
9. For Appadurai (1997), locality is a property of social life, a 'structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity and that yields particular sorts of material effects' (1997: 182). The social form in which locality exists is 'neighborhood'. The latter is analogous to community and the former to feelings of community.
10. Note that the idealised vision of a community was just one factor in the process of community-building in Hivre Bazar (although it was an important one); other factors such as the ecological conditions in the village and the tangible benefits of watershed development were also critical. However, my focus here is on the vision of idealness, because my aim is to show how reified versions of communities can be used in creating feelings of community, with a particular focus on the relation between idealness and community-making. Note also that such reified versions of communities are not a necessary condition for community-formation in all locales.
11. This discussion of the linkage between idealness and community draws on the points made by an anonymous referee.
12. The 1994 guidelines for watershed development have now been revised a number of times. However, these were the national-level guidelines in force when watershed development was undertaken in Hivre Bazar.
13. More specifically, a revenue village, that is, an area whose boundaries are defined and settled by surveys for the purpose of collection of revenue and which could consist of one or more hamlets.
14. There are, however, also elements (such as participation) which are based on a liberal democratic framework. This mix of communitarian and liberal views leads to tensions. In the context of watershed programmes in Andhra Pradesh, for instance, Chhotray (2004) points out how deliberation may be encouraged but the outcome of such deliberation is often pre-determined; similarly, differences are often accommodated superficially in order to secure consensus, resulting in a 'negation of politics' in these projects (Chhotray, 2004).
15. The five conditions are *shramdaan* or voluntary labour, ban on tree-felling, restrictions on free grazing, a ban on alcohol and family planning.
16. *Adarsh* = ideal; *gav* = village; and *yojana* = scheme.
17. Interview with AGY staff person, 4 October 2001.
18. Interview with M.A. Ghare, 4 July 2001. Ghare was the chairperson of the Mid-Term Appraisal Committee set up to review the *Adarsh Gav Yojana*.
19. The *gram sevak* is a village-level government functionary who is responsible for implementing government schemes in the village and for maintaining assorted village records.
20. In the last couple of decades, the term 'indigenous' has been used in a variety of ways. Here I use the term mainly to mean something that is not a part of Western knowledge systems and of modernity (even while recognising that these categories do not exist in water-tight compartments).
21. This point is discussed further in the context of watershed-plus measures (section VI).
22. This is why I use the term fairness, rather than equity, to describe the second constituent of idealness; the latter would require active attempts to reduce all inequalities (such as those based on land). Thanks to Sharachandra Lele (personal communication) for pointing out the need to make a distinction between the two concepts.
23. Houses built of materials such as bricks, cement, and concrete which are supposed to be more permanent.
24. This is similar to the argument that Mosse (2003) makes in the context of representations of indigenous tank water management traditions which shape irrigated landscapes even as they mis-read them.

25. The causation is two-way: the watershed project could be undertaken successfully only because of some degree of unity and solidarity within the village; at the same time, working for the project and its overall positive impact has helped in strengthening these feelings.
26. Diploma in Education.
27. In AGY, one of the conditions that could lead to the scheme being cancelled was the absence of voluntary labour contributions for six continuous months (Government of Maharashtra, n.d.).
28. The pressures of 'development' and the label of an 'ideal village' have led to an additional work burden for women. For instance, when 'important' visitors come to the village, women are given prior intimation so that they can clean and decorate the front-yard of their houses.
29. In the case of tank irrigation in Tamil Nadu, for instance, Mosse (1997) argues that government discourse on *kudimaramat* (communal labour for village repairs) codified community obligations and legitimised its demand on village labour as 'custom'.
30. The broken SHG (discussed earlier), which was an APL SHG, is not included here.
31. Public Distribution System is an institution in India through which the government distributes essential commodities like wheat, rice, sugar, edible oils and kerosene.
32. Only BPL SHGs are likely to get loans from the government for 'productive' purposes. APL SHGs usually end up distributing the money collected by way of individual contributions as consumption loans to members.
33. For instance, registering the *Shakuntala Sambale Bachat Gat* involved two trips on foot to a bank that was five kilometres away, opportunity cost in terms of farm and house work (which often led to criticism from family members) and compliance with assorted bureaucratic requirements.
34. Alternative development is concerned with alternative practices of development with respect to agents, methods and goals (Pieterse, 1998).

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